

TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS' COORDINATION

A MIGRANTS' POLITICS OF PEACE

MAY 2022 JOURNAL

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INTRO

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, the war has been having devastating effects not only on Ukraine, where thousands of men and women are killed, tortured, executed or raped, but on living and working conditions on a global scale. A new transnational order is being crafted, and the governance of migration is a fundamental core of the ongoing transformations. Since the beginning of the war, more than 6 million Ukrainians have fled their country, seeking refuge in a Europe that has suddenly dressed in the guise of solidarity and integration. As migrants, however, we cannot forget the vicious policies of refoulement implemented by the European Union, the costly investments in the militarisation of the borders, the racist hierarchies and the constant division between refugees and asylum seekers, the pacts, initiated or reinforced in the last two years, with third countries to keep migrants out of Europe.

Since the outbreak of the war as Transnational Migrants Coordination we have demanded open borders for anyone seeking safety and freedom of movement and for all those who refuse to enlist in this bloody war. Instead, racist differences and hierarchies were immediately created between those fleeing the war on the basis of skin color and nationality. Between those who arrived in EU countries from Ukraine and those who arrived from Asia or Africa. This journal collects articles from migrant collectives and activists from Greece, Slovenia, the Balkans and Italy. It clearly shows not only that the same hierarchical and racist logics are being reproduced in each of these countries, but also that only a common and transnational stance against the war and the racism it intensifies can enable us to smash the divisions created by migration policies during the war.

As all the contributions point out, after refugees from war zones such as Afghanistan, Yemen, Syria or Iraq had for years been entrusted to third countries considered safe, the European Union has for the first time taken a series of measures to allow Ukrainians to enter and be integrated into its member states, although discriminating Roma people. For Ukrainian refugee women, the EU has provided temporary residence permits, facilitations in obtaining housing, employment, integration in schools and health services: measures hitherto firmly denied for all other migrants. However, everywhere there are huge delays in issuing documents, the economic aid received individually is derisory, and in Poland as in Italy, in France as in Spain, Ukrainian refugee women are employed, as soon as possible, in the service sector, in the factories or in the care sector. The “generous” European reception thus turns out to be the gateway to exploit cheap female labour. All four articles strongly denounce the **two-tier reception regime that was created with the outbreak of the war: while exceptions are allowed for Ukrainians and partial opportunities are created, for the rest of the migrants, rejections continue to increase, the brutal exploitation of those without permits remains unchanged, and conditions in reception centres remain unlivable.**



In Bosnia, migrants are moved to reception centres, and further denied in their freedoms, especially freedom of movement. Poland, which has so far taken in two and a half million Ukrainians, continues to reject migrants from the east who try to enter from Belarus, carrying out an order to reject 'absolutely all (non-Ukrainians)'. In France, Macron announces a prolongation of his policy of selecting migrants according to the needs of the labour market; in Greece, as in Slovenia, violent pushbacks are a daily reality, while reception homes are shut down and the conditions for obtaining a residence permit become more and more complicated. While the West continues to sanction Russia, everywhere access to food and basic goods, housing, and clothing becomes increasingly hard due to inflation, which migrants are the first to suffer. Moreover, economic turmoil and international sanctions are deeply affecting migrants' remittances, as such, causing even more pain both for them and their families.

As the articles show, however, the migrants are not passive pawns. On the first of May in many cities we took to the streets with a powerful slogan, **Strike the war!**, to express together our rejection of the oppression, patriarchal and racist violence and exploitation that the war is intensifying everywhere. **These contributions clearly unveil the transnational dimension of the war and its effects.** With these articles we want to amplify and enlarge the political communication we are building across the borders to fight together against institutional racism and patriarchal oppression exacerbated by war. **We are convinced of the need for a transnational politics of peace expressed by the Permanent Assembly Against War of the Transnational Social Strike,** which allows us to **fight together so that the massacre is stopped, as well as the crisis that hangs over the lives of migrants, workers, women and men who struggle every day for a better life.**

FROM THE BORDERS TO THE CITIES

THE WAR ON MIGRANTS IN GREECE INTENSIFIES

YORGOS & LAZAROS, STOP THE WAR ON MIGRANTS

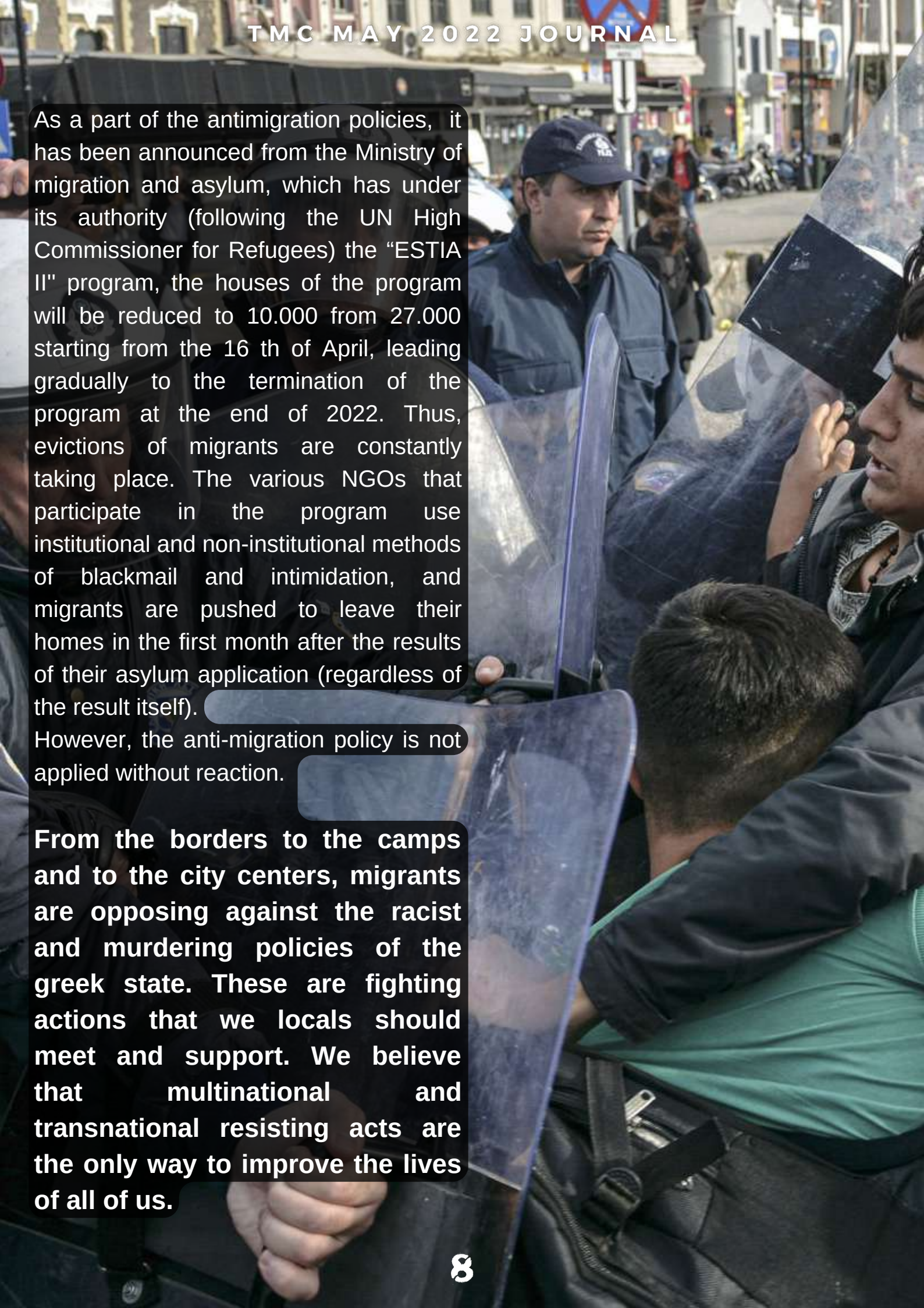
The Greek state has a long tradition in the racist management of migrants within it. Since 1990, a war has been declared against migrants. This war since '90s and on includes the systematic illegalization, devaluation and exploitation of migrants' labor force (during 90s migrants mainly from the Balkans but also from war zones of the Middle East and Africa were exploited for the "development" of greek economy, especially in the fields of construction, healthcare, sex work etc.), violent pushbacks and extreme border violence, the extended detention and the continuous displacement away from the cities, the imprisonment in the migrants and refugees camps. **During all these years the antimigration policies haven't changed. Rather, it was enriched and further developed with the management of the so called "migration crisis" of 2015-16 and the war events in Evros river and Aegean islands in early 2020** (when migrants were portrayed as "invaders" and a complex of police and military forces in cooperation with Frontex and armed patriots and fascists as well, was hunting, shooting and killing migrants at the borders) as "key lessons" for the Greek state.

The last two years in Greece, the war against migrants has been extremely intensified. The new antimigration policies were a continuation of the previous ones and a rupture with the hate politics, the dehumanization of migrants, the militaristic management being the main principles. **After the war events in Evros and the islands, which created a suffocating national unity against the "invaders", a multidimensional attack against migrants has started.**

This attack shortly includes: pushbacks increased and became a daily and lethal practice (pushbacks do not happen only on the borders but actually migrants are getting abducted also from the cities and then are pushbacked), the border violence including shooting, rapes, psychological violence etc intensified, the migrants camps became more and more closed with migrants being forced to never exit camps for several months and cement walls being built around camps with EU-IOM financing, legal reforms were made in order to connect the asylum process with detention all over greece (with the EU-greece-turkey agreement this happened only for the migrants that arrived in Aegean islands), displacement of migrants from the city-centers, the exclusion of migrants from education and healthcare.



After the Russian invasion of Ukraine, members of the greek government (as many other european politicians and journalists) made a clear distinction between “real” refugees (the ones from ukraine) and all the rest. It was announced that the ministry of labor will find jobs for the refugees from Ukraine, so that they can rent apartments by themselves and that their children will attend public schools (there is no similar plan for the “not real” refugees’ children). Nevertheless, according to the ministry, if the refugees from Ukraine fail to find housing by themselves, “up to 30,000 places are available” in the infamous greek “refugees’ camps”.



As a part of the antimigration policies, it has been announced from the Ministry of migration and asylum, which has under its authority (following the UN High Commissioner for Refugees) the “ESTIA II” program, the houses of the program will be reduced to 10.000 from 27.000 starting from the 16 th of April, leading gradually to the termination of the program at the end of 2022. Thus, evictions of migrants are constantly taking place. The various NGOs that participate in the program use institutional and non-institutional methods of blackmail and intimidation, and migrants are pushed to leave their homes in the first month after the results of their asylum application (regardless of the result itself).

However, the anti-migration policy is not applied without reaction.

From the borders to the camps and to the city centers, migrants are opposing against the racist and murdering policies of the greek state. These are fighting actions that we locals should meet and support. We believe that multinational and transnational resisting acts are the only way to improve the lives of all of us.

THE RACIST MANAGEMENT OF MIGRANTS ALONG THE BALKAN ROUTE

NIDZARA AHMETASEVIC

According to the latest info from activists and civil society in the region, since the weather improved, there are more people transiting through the Balkan Route, crossing from one EU country to another. Most of them are people from Afghanistan, as well as people from Eritrea, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Guinea but also Cuba. This is visible also from the data the UNHCR published. Their data also show an increase in the number of people from Ukraine and Russia, especially in North Macedonia and Montenegro, while in Serbia there was a significant increase of people coming from Burundi in March this year. So far, like in other European countries, even in the Balkans people from Ukraine have different treatment, being allowed to move freely, being able to leave the region and move on towards the EU, or being allowed to stay in the region and live outside the centers where the other refugees and migrants are living. In most of the countries in the region, children from Ukraine are easily accepted to schools, and different programs for adults are in place.

At the same time, due to close relations between Russia and Serbia, the country which did not impose sanctions yet, **many Russians are arriving every day**. However, information about what is available for them or where do they go are not available.

In Croatia, Minister of Interior has used the media to differentiate between Ukrainian refugees and those arriving from the Middle East, claiming that the former have documents, while the latter are undocumented migrants.

For non Ukrainians, living conditions in the region remain poor. All over the region there are many makeshift camps, in areas close to the borders. Some people who are at the moment in Serbia, in camp Presevo at the border with North Macedonia, shared with activists pictures and video from the camp showing **degrading and inhumane conditions in the camp where almost 1000 people are forced to live in**. Many of them are taken against their will by the police from the northern part of Serbia, close to the Hungarian border, where they are hoping to cross and enter the Schengen zone. (For more info and video from the camp, please see FB group Help for refugees in Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The situation is similar in other camps in Serbia. At the same time, thousands are living in self-makeshift camps close to Hungarian border.

Practices of illegal pushback from the EU borders toward the Balkans continues, as well as of pushbacks between the countries in the region and towards the EU. Pushbacks, often violent and degrading, are registered between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and Serbia and Bulgaria. Pushbacks are registered also from Hungary, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania. The same is happening from Bosnia and Herzegovina, non-EU member state, but where the so-called “migration management” is under the full control of the EU and its partners in the field, in the first place it is the IOM. From 2018 until today, the IOM is the main receiver of donations from the EU and the individual member states, as well as countries like the UK and some others, dedicated to “migration management”.

Large amounts of these donations have been spent for security related issues, while the EU supplies local police forces with different types of equipment, often used for push backs or for the prevention of the freedom of movement of people inside of the country. (See the latest example here). Frontex is present in the region, even though none of the countries (excluding Croatia) are EU members. Only in BiH this presence is limited to exchange of the info and regularly organised training for local police, while the state did not sign the agreement allowing presence of the Frontex officer on its territory.

Local NGOs are trying to take as many cases to the courts across the region, especially in Serbia where several cases, including one with 17 people from Afghanistan who were pushed back toward Bulgaria, resulted with sentences condemning this practice. Nevertheless, these decisions change little in the field.

In BiH, local police continues to push people towards newly opened reception center Lipa which is 25 km away from the city of Bihac, high up in the mountains, with no access to the infrastructure, and away from the local people. There is no access for the media to the camp, or if some media are allowed to report, it is strictly controlled in a way that their movement is limited as well as choice of people who they can interview. The same practice is in place in other “temporary reception centers” in the country. The rules are set by the IOM and followed and implemented by the IOM, their partners and local government.



In April, the media in Croatia published a story about people who died on their way to the EU in Bosnia. According to this report, only in one part of the country, north-west area, close to the Croatian border, since 2018, **over 50 death cases are registered**. Out of this number **10 are not identified**, and their bodies are buried in the local cemeteries. More cases are registered in other parts of the country. Causes of death are different. Local solidarians are often people who help with identification, and in some cases with burial or to send bodies back to their families in the countries of origin. For this, the network of contacts between locals and people in other countries are established over the years.

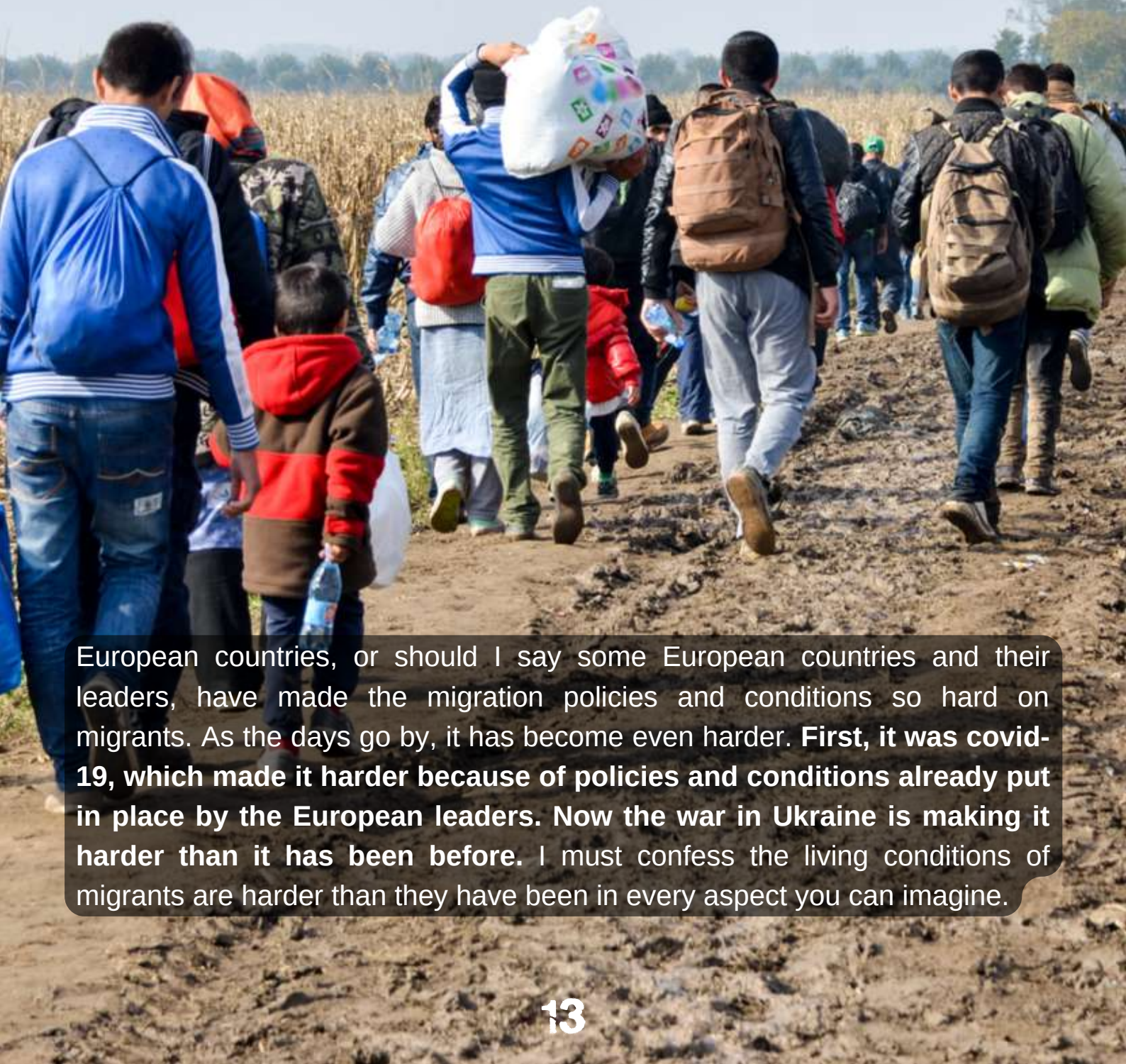


However, there are no exact data about how many people died in the Balkans. Non-formal group of activists and researchers established that **at least 259 people have died since 2016, after the Balkan corridor closed in the end of February 2016**, highest number in BiH. Most of them died while trying to cross the borders.

At the end, **local people in BiH remain active and showing solidarity despite pressure they face from the authorities**. At the same time, a significant number of international volunteers and NGOs are present in the country, but there is hardly any cooperation or exchange of information between locals and internationals.

DISCRIMINATION, POOR ACCOMMODATIONS, LACK OF SOCIAL FACILITIES IN SLOVENIA

AP. NANA, INFOKOLPA, SLOVENIA



European countries, or should I say some European countries and their leaders, have made the migration policies and conditions so hard on migrants. As the days go by, it has become even harder. **First, it was covid-19, which made it harder because of policies and conditions already put in place by the European leaders. Now the war in Ukraine is making it harder than it has been before.** I must confess the living conditions of migrants are harder than they have been in every aspect you can imagine.

The war in Ukraine is having a big impact on migrants in many ways:

1. **Discrimination.** The war has made way for open discrimination between migrants because the European countries and their leaders are discriminating between migrants making others feel less important. They provided a fast solution to some migrants while many have been waiting for a very long time.
2. **Poor accommodations.** The war has led to high congestion in many countries for it is estimated that more than 5 million people have fled from the war zone since the war began adding to the number of migrants already in these countries. This has led to poor accommodations due to a lack of enough space.
3. **Lack of social facilities.** Already migrants are limited to many social facilities due to a lack of funds. With the war in Russia and Ukraine, things have become so expensive that it is almost impossible for migrants to access basic social facilities and get things such as cooking oil. Roughly, Russia and Ukraine supply the world with 65% of sunflowers. The war has disrupted the supply which is having a significant impact on prices and it is harder for migrants to have access to supplies due to a lack of funds.

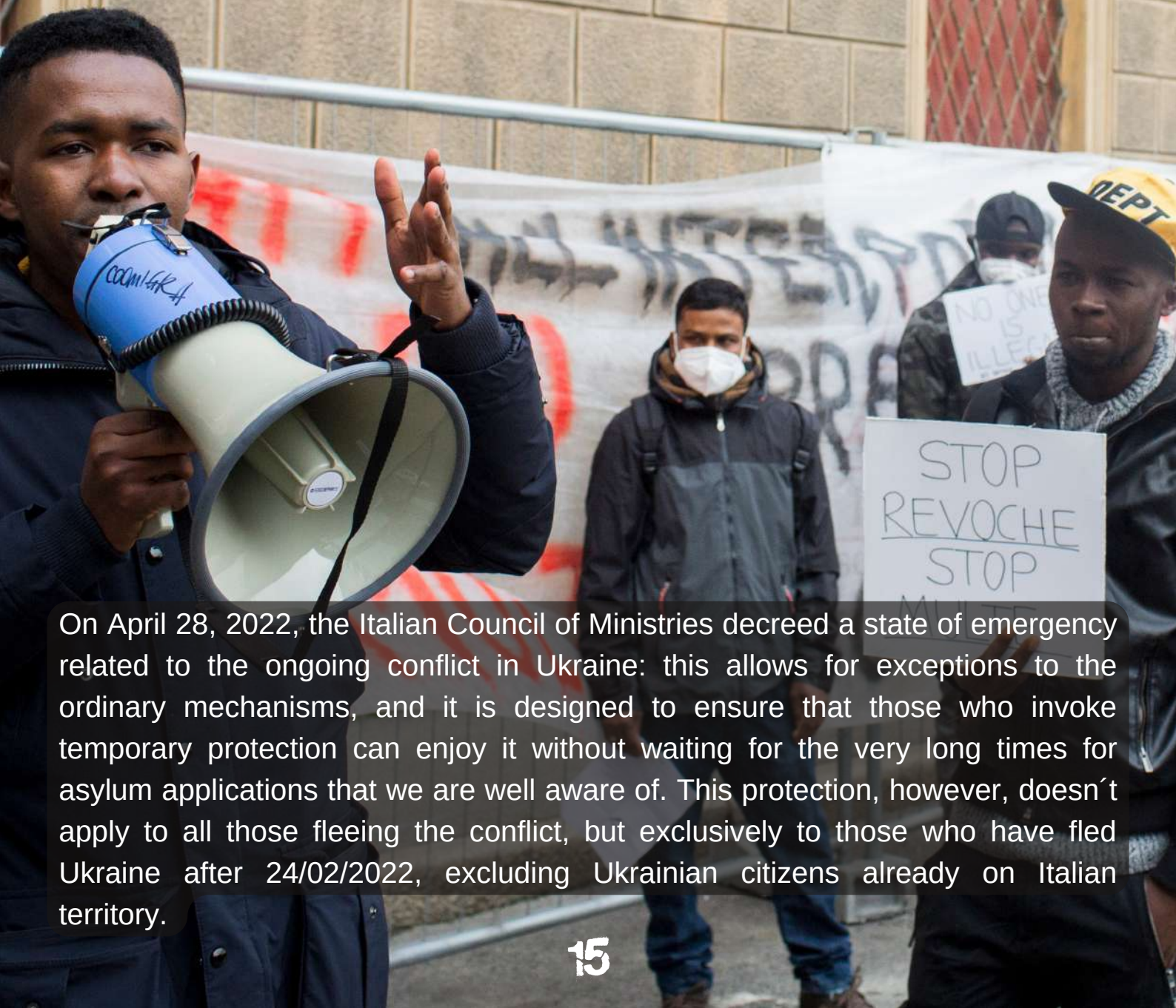
It is a pity that our brothers and sisters are going through this after having gone to war already with covid-19 and now this which is something the world has never dreamed of due to the impact it has on the world. But this is not a reason for discrimination. **When it comes to migration policies for every migrant there must be the same treatment.** European countries and their leaders should also try to create more and bigger accommodations for migrants and try to put in place a policy for migrants which will help them access social facilities.



OUR DAILY STRUGGLE AGAINST THE WAR

FIGHTING INSTITUTIONAL
RACISM IN ITALY WHILE
BUILDING A TRANSNATIONAL
MOVEMENT.

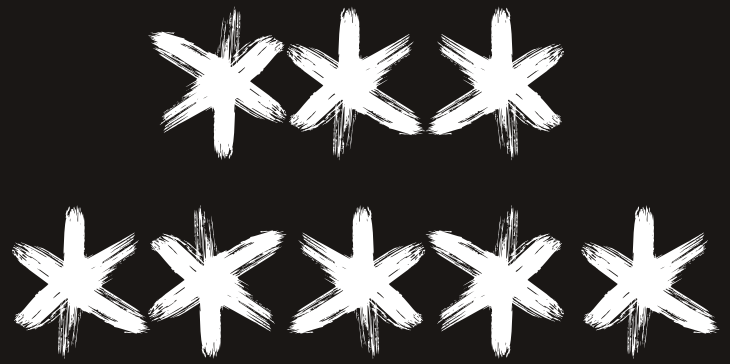
COORDINAMENTO MIGRANTI BOLOGNA



On April 28, 2022, the Italian Council of Ministries decreed a state of emergency related to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine: this allows for exceptions to the ordinary mechanisms, and it is designed to ensure that those who invoke temporary protection can enjoy it without waiting for the very long times for asylum applications that we are well aware of. This protection, however, doesn't apply to all those fleeing the conflict, but exclusively to those who have fled Ukraine after 24/02/2022, excluding Ukrainian citizens already on Italian territory.


While theoretically, the protection addresses to all migrants who, in Ukraine, were holders of international or national protection and those who had a permanent residence permit, in fact, few were able to take advantage of it. In fact, the percentage of people with permanent permits in Ukraine is very low, and temporary permits are much more common. Migrants who were in Ukraine also have to prove that they cannot safely and stably return to their country or region of origin to aspire to temporary protection. Indeed, once they arrive in Europe, many migrants with citizenship other than Ukrainian, fleeing the same war, are pushed back to Nigeria, Morocco, India, Pakistan or elsewhere.

While in recent months, we have heard the European Union and its States declare open borders for all, it remains evident how in practice they do not loosen the grip of institutional racism, producing new hierarchies related to skin color and residence permit. For Ukrainian citizens, mostly women, concessions have been possible:



residence permits for temporary protection can be requested directly at police headquarters and the Dublin regulation does not apply. This shows two things: **that the institutional racism of the Italian government and Europe is a political choice, and that regularization is linked to precise hierarchies that see migrants as a labor force to be exploited.** Blacks in the fields and factories, Ukrainians to plug welfare holes. The war is exacerbating all this.

Moreover, behind the appearance of a sympathetic welcome, **there are many flaws in the reception system.** Long waits, and precariousness are common also for Ukrainian women, who have to ask for help from their compatriots already working in Italy, largely in the domestic service and care sector, who now find themselves using their wages to support fleeing families, while their savings fly away together with the dream of returning to their own country and having a home of their own.

A woman with dark hair, smiling broadly, is shouting into a blue and white megaphone. She is wearing a dark jacket. In the background, there is a metal fence and a red banner with white text that is partially obscured. The scene appears to be outdoors, possibly at a protest or a public gathering.

In fact, the government's aid to those who are not in the reception system, but have found housing independently, is paltry, to say the least: 300 euros per month for up to 3 months, received only from obtaining a residence permit slip and social security number, which still takes a long time. Even paltrier is the fact that such a contribution has never been addressed to migrants of any other origin, not even the Afghan women refugees who arrived last summer. Just like all migrants, without a residence permit one cannot have a regular work contract and thus be able to earn enough to survive independently. Not a few choose to leave Italy to go to Germany, Israel or even back to Ukraine.

With the Ukrainian emergency, an additional 5,000 places have been allocated in Extraordinary Reception Centers (CAS) and 3,000 places in Widespread Reception Centers (SAI). Once you agree to stay in reception and sign the pact, which for Ukrainian female refugees is not yet drafted, you can decide to leave freely, however once you leave you cannot return, not only to that specific facility, but to any facility nationwide. As with asylum seekers kicked out of reception with absurd reimbursements to pay, Ukrainian women refugees will not be able to earn more than 5900 euros a year, if they do not want to risk being kicked out of facilities and pay the costs of a reception that the government prides itself on offering, even more so in times of war, and which remains based on the blackmail of a residence permit.

In the wannabe “democratic” Bologna, **the body to which the various reception cooperatives (ASP) belong has asked them to quickly notify to the labor centers the Ukrainian refugees who intend to stay in Italy**, even if they cannot yet speak Italian and even if they are waiting for a permit. It is clear how this is linked to the **attempt to turn Ukrainian women refugees into cheap labor**: so many bosses and proprietors are eager to have a cheap, “white” workforce at their disposal so they can show off their “magnanimity.” After all, since the early days of the war, many have been willing to offer underpaid jobs in Riviera beach establishments.

Despite the fear of exposure and the difficulty of struggle, migrants have not remained silent. The Migrants Coordination of Bologna and the Women's Assembly of Migrants Coordination took to the streets in Bologna on May 1 to scream out loud: Strike the war!, and on May 7 to show that we fight against the war also through our daily struggles:

against the racist effects that the war is imposing, against the impoverishment and patriarchal violence it is reproducing, against this differentiated and racist management, and against the condition in which migrant women are living, exposed to the violence of the bosses.

In face of this war, that is becoming more and more global in its effects and dynamics, **we continue to fight for an unconditional European residence permit, unbounded from income, family, work and countries of origin.** We organize inside, outside, and throughout the European borders, in order to strengthen our transnational coordination and our collective power, because we know **how fundamental it is to organize together if we want to succeed.** We actively participate in the Transnational Social Strike's Permanent Assembly Against War, because only together can we build a collective struggle that can better our lives and free us from institutional racism, patriarchy and exploitation, and their interlacements with this war.

Strike racism! Strike the war!

CONTACTS

The Transnational Migrants Coordination involves migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, collectives and groups from France, Italy, Spain, Germany, Slovenia, Macedonia, Greece, Turkey, Morocco and Lebanon. The time has come to take back migrants' lives!

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Facebook: TRANSNATIONAL MIGRANTS COORDINATION

Website: www.transnational-strike.info